WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A gaming method, comprising:

receiving an identifier from a first gaming unit, wherein the identifier is

5   associated with a tournament game card, wherein the tournament game card is

provided to a player in response to paying a fee;

determining whether the identifier received from the first gaming unit is

authentic;

determining a duration the player may play in a tournament based on the

10   identifier;

enabling the first gaming unit for play in the tournament for the duration if the

identifier is authentic;

receiving a tournament score of the player;

determining a winning player of the tournament, if any; and

15   if the winning player of the tournament is determined, generating data

indicative of a value payout to be awarded to the winning player.

2.   A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein the identifier is

printed on the tournament game card.

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3.   A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein the identifier is

electronically encoded on the tournament game card.

4.   A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein the duration

25   comprises an amount of time.

5.   A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein the duration

comprises a number of games.

6.   A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein determining the duration based on the identifier comprises retrieving the duration from storage based on the identifier.

5   7.   A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein determining the duration based on the identifier comprises decoding the identifier to determine the duration.

8.   A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein the duration

10   comprises an amount of time, the method further comprising:

initializing a timer with the determined amount of time;

starting the timer;

wherein enabling the first gaming unit comprises enabling the first gaming unit for play in the tournament while the timer is running;

15   stopping the timer after the timer has run for the determined amount of time.

9.   A gaming method according to claim 8, further comprising:

stopping the timer at a request of the player; and

restarting the timer at a request of the player if the timer has not run for the

20   determined amount of time.

10.   A gaming method according to claim 9, further comprising:

storing an indication of a remaining amount of time for the player to play in the tournament after the timer stops; and

25   re–initializing the timer based on the stored indication of the remaining amount of time before the timer restarts.

11.   A gaming method according to claim 10, further comprising:

receiving the identifier from a second gaming unit after the timer stops;

determining whether the identifier received from the second gaming unit is authentic;

wherein re–initializing the timer comprises re–initializing the timer if the

5   identifier received from the second gaming unit is authentic; and

enabling the second gaming unit for play in the tournament while the timer is running.

12.   A gaming method according to claim 11, wherein the timer comprises

10 a first timer implemented by the first gaming unit and a second timer implemented by the second gaming unit;

wherein initializing the timer comprises initializing the first timer;

wherein enabling the first gaming unit comprises enabling the first gaming unit while the first timer is running;

15 wherein re–initializing the timer comprises initializing the second timer; and

wherein enabling the second gaming unit comprises enabling the second gaming unit for play in the tournament while the second timer is running.

13.   A gaming method according to claim 8, wherein the timer is

20 implemented, at least in part, by the first gaming unit.

14.   A gaming method according to claim 8, wherein the first gaming unit is operatively coupled to the tournament game card, wherein the timer is implemented, at least in part, by the tournament game card.

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15.   A gaming method according to claim 8, wherein the timer is implemented, at least in part, by the tournament server.

16.   A gaming method according to claim 1, further comprising loading gaming software to the first gaming unit after the player chooses the first gaming unit, wherein the gaming software is to configure the first gaming unit for playing in the tournament.

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17.   A gaming method according to claim 16, wherein the gaming software comprises at least one of an executable file, a configuration file, a data file, a pay table, and a plurality of seeds for a random number generator.

10   18.   A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein the tournament game card comprises at least one of a magnetic swipe card, a smart card, a PC card, and a portable memory device.

19.   A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein receiving the
15   tournament score of the player comprises receiving the tournament score of the player before the timer has stopped.

20.   A gaming method according to claim 1, wherein receiving the tournament score of the player comprises receiving the tournament score of the player
20   after the timer has stopped.

21.   A tournament server, comprising:

a network interface operatively coupled to a network;

a controller operatively coupled to the network interface, the controller comprising a processor and a memory operatively coupled to the processor, the
5   controller configured to:

receive, via the network interface, an identifier from a first gaming unit, wherein the identifier is associated with a tournament game card, wherein the tournament game card is provided to a player in response to paying a fee;

determine whether the identifier received from the first gaming unit is
10   authentic;

determine a duration the player may play in a tournament based on the identifier;

enable the first gaming unit for play in the tournament for the duration if the identifier is authentic;

15   receive a tournament score of the player;

determine a winning player of the tournament, if any; and

if the winning player of the tournament is determined, generate data indicative of a value payout to be awarded to the winning player.

20   22.   A tournament server according to claim 21, wherein the duration comprises an amount of time.

23.   A tournament server according to claim 21, wherein the duration comprises a number of games.

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24.   A tournament server according to claim 21, wherein the controller is configured to retrieve the duration from storage based on the identifier.

25. A tournament server according to claim 21, wherein the controller is configured to decode the identifier to determine the duration.

26. A tournament server according to claim 21, wherein the duration

5   comprises an amount of time, and wherein the controller is further configured to:

initialize a timer with the amount of time;

start the timer;

enable the first gaming unit while the timer is running; and

stop the timer after the timer has run for the determined amount of time.

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27. A tournament server according to claim 26, wherein the controller is configured to:

stop the timer at a request of the player; and

restart the timer at a request of the player if the timer has not run for the

15   determined amount of time.

28. A tournament server according to claim 27, wherein the controller is configured to:

store an indication of a remaining amount of time for the player to play in the

20   tournament after the timer has been stopped; and

re–initialize the timer based on the stored indication of the remaining amount of time before the timer is restarted.

29. A tournament server according to claim 28, wherein the controller is

25   configured to:

receive the identifier from a second gaming unit after the player stopped the timer;

determine whether the identifier received from the second gaming unit is authentic;

re–initialize the timer if the identifier received from the second gaming unit is authentic; and

5   enable the second gaming unit for play in the tournament while the timer is running.

30.   A gaming method, comprising:

receiving a fee from a player to play in a tournament;

10   configuring a gaming unit for playing in the tournament while a timer implemented by the gaming unit is running;

starting the timer at a request of a player;

enabling the gaming unit for play in the tournament while the timer is running;

stopping the timer after the timer has run for a period of time;

15   reporting a tournament score of the player to a tournament server;

if the player wins the tournament, generating data indicative of a value payout to be awarded to the player.

31.   A gaming method according to claim 30, further comprising:

20   stopping the timer at a request of the player; and

restarting the timer at a request of the player if the tournament timer has not run for the predetermined period of time.

32.   A gaming method according to claim 30, wherein configuring a

25   gaming unit for playing in the tournament comprises loading gaming software to the gaming unit.

33. A gaming method according to claim 32, wherein loading gaming software to the gaming unit comprises transmitting the gaming software to the gaming unit via a network.

5 34. A gaming method according to claim 32, wherein loading gaming software to the gaming unit comprises loading the gaming software from at least one of a floppy disk, a CD-ROM, a DVD, a PC card, a smart card, and a portable memory device.

10 35. A gaming method according to claim 32, wherein the gaming software comprises at least one of an executable file, a configuration file, a data file, a pay table, and a plurality of seeds for a random number generator.

36. A gaming method according to claim 32, wherein the gaming unit
15 includes a smart card, wherein the tournament timer is implemented, at least in part, by the smart card.

37. A gaming method according to claim 32, wherein the gaming unit comprises a PC card, wherein the tournament timer is implemented, at least in part, by
20 the PC card.

38. A gaming method according to claim 32, wherein the gaming unit includes a portable memory device, wherein the tournament timer is implemented, at least in part, by the portable memory device.

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39. A gaming method according to claim 32, further comprising prompting the player to choose the predetermined period of time.

40.   A gaming method according to claim 39, wherein the fee is based on the chosen predetermined amount of time.

41.   A gaming method according to claim 32, further comprising:

5   providing the player with a tournament game card in response to the player paying the fee, wherein the tournament game card includes an identifier associated therewith; and

submitting the identifier to a tournament server for authentication.

42.   A gaming method, comprising:

receiving an identifier from a first gaming unit, wherein the identifier is provided to a player in response to paying a fee;

determining whether the identifier received from the first gaming unit is

5   authentic;

determining an amount of time the player may play in a tournament based on the identifier;

initializing a timer with the determined amount of time if the identifier received from the first gaming unit is authentic;

10   starting the timer;

enabling the first gaming unit for play in the tournament for at least a first subset of time that the timer is running;

stopping the timer after the timer has run for the determined amount of time; and

15   receiving a tournament score of the player;

determining a winning player of the tournament, if any; and

if the winning player of the tournament is determined, generating data indicative of a value payout to be awarded to the winning player.

20   43.   A gaming method according to claim 42, wherein determining the amount of time based on the identifier comprises retrieving the amount of time from storage based on the identifier.

44.   A gaming method according to claim 42, wherein determining the

25   amount of time based on the identifier comprises decoding the identifier to determine the amount of time.

45.   A gaming method according to claim 42, further comprising:

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stopping the timer at a request of the player; and

restarting the timer at a request of the player if the timer has not run for the determined amount of time.

5   46.   A gaming method according to claim 45, further comprising:

storing an indication of a remaining amount of time for the player to play in the tournament after the timer is stopped; and

re–initializing the timer based on the stored indication of the remaining amount of time before timer is restarted.

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47.   A gaming method according to claim 46, further comprising:

receiving the identifier from a second gaming unit after the player stopped the timer;

determining whether the identifier received from the second gaming unit is

15   authentic;

wherein re–initializing the timer comprises re–initializing the timer if the identifier received from the second gaming unit is authentic; and

enabling the second gaming unit for play in the tournament for at least a second subset of time that the timer is running.

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48.   A gaming method according to claim 46, wherein the timer comprises a first timer implemented by the first gaming unit and a second timer implemented by the second gaming unit;

wherein initializing the timer comprises initializing the first timer;

25   wherein enabling the first gaming unit comprises enabling the first gaming unit while the first timer is running;

wherein re–initializing the timer comprises initializing the second timer; and

wherein enabling the second gaming unit comprises enabling the second gaming unit while the second timer is running.

49.   A gaming method according to claim 42, wherein the timer is implemented by the first gaming unit.

50.   A gaming method according to claim 49, wherein the first gaming unit comprises a tournament game card, wherein the timer is implemented by the tournament game card.

51.   A gaming method according to claim 50, wherein the tournament game card comprises a smart card.

52.   A gaming method according to claim 50, wherein the tournament game card comprises a PC card.

53.   A gaming method according to claim 50, wherein the tournament game card comprises a portable memory device.

54.   A gaming method according to claim 42, wherein the timer is implemented by the tournament server communicatively coupled to the gaming unit.

55.   A gaming method according to claim 42, further comprising loading gaming software to the first gaming unit after the player has chosen the first gaming unit, wherein the gaming software configures the first gaming unit for playing in the tournament.

56. A gaming method according to claim 42, wherein a tournament game card is provided to the player in response to paying the fee, wherein the tournament game card includes the identifier.

5   57. A gaming method according to claim 56, wherein the tournament game card comprises at least one of a magnetic swipe card, a smart card, a PC card, and a portable memory device.

58. A gaming method according to claim 42, wherein receiving the
10   tournament score of the player from the first gaming unit comprises receiving the tournament score of the player before the timer has stopped.

59. A gaming method according to claim 42, wherein receiving the tournament score of the player from the first gaming unit comprises receiving the
15   tournament score of the player after the timer has stopped.

60.   A tournament server, comprising:

a network interface operatively coupled to a network;

a controller operatively coupled to the network interface, the controller comprising a processor and a memory operatively coupled to the processor, the controller configured to:

receive an identifier from a gaming unit via the network interface, wherein the identifier is provided to a player in response to paying a fee;

determine whether the identifier received from the gaming unit is authentic;

determine an amount of time the player may play in a tournament;

initialize a timer with the determined amount of time if the identifier received from the first gaming unit is authentic;

start the timer;

enable the gaming unit for play in the tournament while the timer is running;

stop the timer after the timer has run for the determined amount of time; and

receive a tournament score of the player via the network interface;

determine a winning player of the tournament, if any; and

if the winning player of the tournament is determined, generate data indicative of a value payout to be awarded to the winning player.